

For Simon Barton, friend and scholar, in memoriam

‘Early Medieval Spain, 800-1100: The Christian Kingdoms and al-Andalus’^{*}

in

S. Mossman (ed.), *Debating the Middle Ages, Vol. I: The Post-Roman World*

The history of early medieval Spain (here shorthand for the whole of the Iberian Peninsula, for the Kingdom of Portugal did not come into existence until 1139) is unlike that of the other major western European kingdoms of the period in one crucial respect: in 800 between half and two thirds of the peninsula had been ruled for almost a century by Islam. Yet Islamic Iberia was in its own way something of an anomaly within the wider Muslim world.¹ For a start, it lay on the very western fringes of the Islamic empire, presenting a series of challenges to its distant overlords. One such challenge was government, and, in particular, how to implement and enforce its strictures from afar. Throughout the first half of the eighth century, the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus (Syria) managed affairs in Iberia via a series of governors (sing. *walī*), at least some of whom were appointed by, or at least in consultation with, the governors of Ifrīqiya, based at Qayrawan (Tunisia).² Political and cultural relations across the Straits of Gibraltar were to remain central to further developments, and it is as well to remind ourselves at this point of an emerging pattern that holds true for the entirety of the Middle Ages: Muslim Spain, from its beginnings, was just as much affected by relations with North

^{*} Every attempt has been made to focus on English-language secondary literature in this chapter, as well as translations into English of primary sources. Many important contributions in Spanish are not cited here, although sometimes it has been impossible to discuss the major outlines of the history and historiography of the topic without reverting to Spanish-language materials.

¹ The background to these changes: M. Brett, ‘The Arab Conquest and Rise of Islam in North Africa’, in J. D. Fage (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol. II, c. 500 BC-AD 1050* (Cambridge, 1979), 490-555. Cf. H. Kennedy, ‘The Muslims in Europe’, in R. McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. II, 700-900* (Cambridge, 1995), 249-71, henceforth *NCMH II*.

² Kennedy, ‘The Muslims in Europe’, 258. Ifrīqiya was the name given to the coastal plain of North Africa from western Libya to Mauretania.

Africa as it was with Islam's political strongholds in the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent.

North Africa had indeed been the springboard for the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711, when the Catholic Visigothic kingdom of Toledo, **discussed in chapter XX**, was destroyed by armies composed largely of Berber troops, fighting under the banner of Islam. Later accounts make it clear that most of Visigothic *Hispania* fell to the conquerors within three years.³ Garrisons were established in all but the remotest corners of the peninsula, negotiations were conducted with provincial governors left in limbo by the demise of their Visigothic paymasters, and deals were soon struck so as to ensure some measure of stability between the conquerors and the conquered. These deals – more properly pacts or treaties – confirmed the protection of certain basic freedoms of the conquered peoples, including the right to go about their daily lives unmolested, in exchange for the payment of a capitation tax (*jizya*).⁴ This was a concession extended by Muslims to followers of other monotheistic faiths, known in Islam as 'People of the Book' (*Ahl al-Kitāb*). Christians and Jews, therefore, were afforded the status of '*dhimmi*', or 'protected peoples', so long as they showed themselves willing to accept certain restrictions on their conduct – the ringing of church bells, for instance, was considered particularly bad form.

Things did not always progress quite as smoothly as the foregoing might suggest, and Roger Collins has rightly underlined that revolt was never too far away in Muslim Spain throughout the eighth and ninth centuries. Yet it did not always emerge where we might expect it.⁵ The Berber populations, for example, rose in rebellion within thirty years of the conquest,

³ For general guides, see R. Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain: 710-797* (Oxford, 1989); cf. R. Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered: From 711 to 1502* (Edinburgh, 2014). For an investigation of the Arabic source material, see N. Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia: Medieval Arabic Narratives* (London, 2012).

⁴ The pact between the Visigothic aristocrat Theodomir and Abd al-Aziz, the first governor of Islamic Spain, survives in the Arabic historiographical tradition and has been translated into English in O. Remie Constable, *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim and Jewish Sources*, 2nd edn. (Philadelphia, 2012), 45-6.

⁵ R. Collins, *Caliphs and Kings: Spain, 796-1031* (Chichester, 2012), esp. chs. 2 and 5.

apparently in response to having been largely excluded from the spoils of war and treated as second-class citizens by their co-religionists. This revolt followed in the wake of an even more serious rebellion by Berber groups in North Africa in 739/740.⁶ Significantly, then, the so-called Great Berber Revolt saw the fault lines of ethnic tension emerge in Iberia relatively soon after the conquest, albeit not, on this occasion, because of discord between Muslim and Christian: Berber, Syrian and Yemeni, all of whom were present in the peninsula in significant numbers by the middle of the eighth century, may have been united by their shared faith, but there remained many insoluble matters of socio-cultural distinction and hierarchy to overcome.

The caliph in Damascus, Hisham (724-43), doubtless dismayed by this outbreak of insurrection in the 'Wild West' of his domains, dealt with the Berber challenge to his authority with lethal force: a large army, composed of professional Syrian troops organised into units known as *aḡnād* (sing. *ḡund*), was despatched to the western Mediterranean, where, after a handful of setbacks, it put an end to Berber resistance in Spain.⁷ Building upon both the prestige that they had already won for themselves as ardent disseminators of the Prophet's message, and the support of large numbers of newly-arrived Syrian troops, from 755 the Syrian Umayyads were to assume an even more central role in Iberian affairs. In this year one of the dynasty's last surviving princes sought refuge in Spain after a coup d'état had caused his family to surrender power to the Abbasids in Islam's near eastern heartlands in 750.⁸ Thus was born the Umayyad emirate in Spain, a dynasty in exile, on the fringes of the civilized world.

⁶ Discussed in H. Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of Al-Andalus* (New York and London, 1986), 23-9; idem, 'The Muslims in Europe', 258-9. The best overview of Berber society is found in M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford, 1996).

⁷ On the later settlement of the various *ḡund* groups in southern Spain see E. Manzano Moreno, 'El asentamiento y la organización de los *ḡund*-s sirios en el Al-Andalus', *Al-Qanṭara* 14 (1993), 327-59, now translated as 'The Settlement and Organisation of the Syrian Junds in al-Andalus', in M. Marin (ed.), *The Formation of al-Andalus, Part I: History and Society* (Aldershot, 1999), 85-114.

⁸ The best general account of this process in English remains that of Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (Harlow, 2004), 123-32; see also the lucid account of E. Manzano Moreno, 'The Iberian Peninsula and North Africa', in *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol I: The Formation of the Islamic World – Sixth to Eleventh Centuries* (Cambridge, 2010), 581-622.

All was not lost for the Umayyads. The arrival in Spain in 755 of Abd al-Rahmān I, fleeing Abbasid persecution, brought a measure of stability and legitimacy to the westernmost part of the *Dar al-Islam* ('the abode of Islam'). Yet, as the tenth-century historian Ibn al-Qūṭīya makes plain, Abd al-Rahmān's family had plenty of enemies in Spain, and this dispossessed scion of the Umayyad dynasty was by no means universally acclaimed on his arrival.⁹ His bid for power was nonetheless built on firm foundations. For a start, he could call upon the associated prestige of ancestors who had ruled the entire Islamic world. Furthermore, he was blessed with the support of significant numbers of *mawālī*, converts drawn from conquered peoples who owed their station in life to their lord; he was also able to claim descent from the Prophet's tribe of the Quraysh: a potent admixture of advantages which saw him win acceptance as *emir* by 756.¹⁰ The Umayyads chose to base their polity (until 929 officially an 'emirate', or 'principality') in the old Roman city of Córdoba, and coins minted soon after the invasion show that Islamic Spain soon came to be known as al-Andalus, a term of contested origins.¹¹ The extent to which the Umayyads truly controlled areas beyond the capital and its hinterlands continues to be debated by historians.¹² At the very least, it is beyond doubt that in Córdoba three centuries or so of great prosperity and power followed the invasion, the political clout of the city and its rulers made clear in contemporary sources from further afield. According to the *Royal Frankish Annals*, for instance, a diplomatic peace was settled between the Carolingians and the Umayyads in 810, a sure sign of the grudging respect that existed

⁹ D. James (ed. and trans), *Early Islamic Spain: The History of Ibn al-Qūṭīya, a study of the unique Arabic manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, with a translation, notes, and comments* (London, 2009), 67-74.

¹⁰ Kennedy, 'The Muslims in Europe', 260. See also M. Fierro, 'Mawālī and Muwalladūn in al-Andalus (Second/Eighth-Fourth-Tenth Centuries)', in M. Bernards and J. Nawas (eds), *Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam* (Leiden, 2005), 195-245.

¹¹ On the early Andalusī coinage see M. Crusafont, A. Balaguer and P. Grierson, *Medieval European Coinage, Volume 6: The Iberian Peninsula* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. 55-61.

¹² Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 38-49 and ch. 5, suggests that Umayyad control beyond Córdoba was subject to constant challenge.

between the two great powers of ninth-century Europe.¹³ Indeed, such were the riches, and such – it would seem – was the appetite for the trappings of urban civilisation of the inhabitants of Córdoba, that by the tenth century the city was described by a learned Saxon contemporary as ‘the ornament of the world’.¹⁴ Rich, magnificent to behold, and vast in size by the standards of the day, Córdoba continues to loom large in the imagination of some historians – a beacon of tolerance and enlightenment in a world otherwise not readily disposed to those values.¹⁵ Needless to say, this view has been contested, as we shall see.¹⁶

In contrast, the northern third of the peninsula, from the Atlantic coast to the Mediterranean littoral, was a world apart, controlled by several small Christian kingdoms, each in some way building upon a common Roman and Visigothic heritage, by turns real and imagined.¹⁷ Here the principal kingdom was that of Asturias-León, based from the late eighth century in the small city of Oviedo, high in the Asturian Mountains (see map on p. XX). This kingdom was supposedly founded in 718 after a Christian victory over Muslim forces at Covadonga, apparently orchestrated by the mysterious figure of Pelayo.¹⁸ Important Christian rivals existed in the shape of the tiny kingdom of Navarre, about which almost nothing is known before the middle of the ninth century, and the counties of Catalonia and Castile; all three of these polities only emerged as significant players after c.850.¹⁹ None of them matched al-

¹³ For the original Latin text, see MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi* (henceforth SRG), 6, at 137. An English translation can be found in P. D. King, *Charlemagne: Translated Sources* (Kendal, 1987), 103.

¹⁴ These words are those of the Saxon nun Hrotsvitha. They can be consulted, in Latin, in MGH, SRG, 34, at 52.

¹⁵ The most well-known of this type of account is M. R. Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston, 2002).

¹⁶ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 1-4; for a more trenchant statement of a similar position, see D. Fernández-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise. Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain* (Wilmington, 2015).

¹⁷ For an overview see R. Collins, ‘Spain: the Northern Kingdoms and the Basques, 711-910’, in *NCMH II*, 272-89.

¹⁸ Perhaps tellingly, Pelayo does not feature in the only major Latin chronicle written by an Iberian Christian in al-Andalus in the eighth century, the so called *Mozarabic Chronicle*, or *Chronicle of 754*, which is available in English translation in K. B. Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of early Medieval Spain* (Liverpool, 1999).

¹⁹ Collins, ‘Spain: the Northern Kingdoms’, at 284-9; idem, on the origins of Navarre, *Caliphs and Kings*, ch. 8, and on the origins of Castile, *ibid*, ch. 9.

Andalus in terms of resources or political prestige, but their rich and powerful neighbours to the south could hardly be ignored. Records of diplomatic and political relations between north and south from *c.* 750 to *c.* 950 suggest a scenario of prolonged periods of relative peace punctured by bouts of warfare – tit-for-tat battles across the not always easily identifiable ‘frontier’ lands of the high central plain of the peninsula.²⁰

Historiographical Orientation

For most of the twentieth century battles across the frontier were said to embody key moments in a providential mission thought to give Spanish historical experience its unique character, and, furthermore, to underpin Spanish conceptions of nationhood and identity. Viewed from this vantage point, the history of medieval Spain was the history of the Christian reconquest of the peninsula from Islam, known in Spanish as *Reconquista*.²¹ Although dominant for much of the twentieth century, almost all historians now accept that this concept fails to offer a sufficiently nuanced or complex view of the process that saw the Christians slowly expel Muslim political authorities from the peninsula. It was long believed that the ‘Reconquest’ was only made possible by another process which has assumed an equally central role in Spanish historiography: the so-called depopulation (*despoblación*) of the Duero Valley (map), a large expanse of tableland stretching across the central reaches of the peninsula. This notion came to be associated with the single most significant historian of medieval Spain of the twentieth century, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz (1893-1984).²² Building upon an idea first

²⁰ For a flavour of this kind of activity, see Colin Smith’s translation of a short extract from a Latin chronicle attributed to the early eleventh-century bishop Sampiro; although explicitly pro-Christian, it tells of battles, ransoms and attempts to sue for peace. The extract is entitled ‘Advance and Settlement under Alfonso III (late 9th century)’, and is in C. Smith, *Christians and Moors in Spain, AD 711-1150* (3 vols., Warminster, 1988), vol. I, 50-3. On the frontier, see E. Manzano Moreno, ‘The Creation of a Medieval Frontier: Islam and Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula’, in D. Power and N. Standen (eds), *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700-1700* (Basingstoke, 1999), 32-54.

²¹ P. Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain* (Oxford, 1993), ch. 4; cf. F. Fernandez-Armesto, ‘The Survival of a Notion of *Reconquista* in late tenth- and early eleventh-century León’, in T. Reuter (ed.), *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Karl Leyser* (London, 1992), 123-43.

²² Sánchez-Albornoz’s output was vast. His most famous work has been translated into English as *Spain: A Historical Enigma*, trans. C. J. Dees and D. S. Reher (2 vols., Madrid, 1975).

mooted, albeit less stridently, by Portuguese historians such as Alexandre Herculano, Sánchez-Albornoz argued that late antique demographic decline in these central regions was compounded by the strategic creation in the eighth and ninth centuries of a deserted frontier-zone between Christianity in the north and Islam in the south.²³ This was supposedly an endeavour supported by Asturian kings from the time of Alfonso I onwards (739-757), and simultaneously taken up with great zeal by the Christian peasants of the Duero valley, cast in this story as sturdy pioneers. It was these same hardy frontiersmen, willing to migrate across the vast dusty plains of central Spain in search of land to claim as their own, who later ‘repopulated’ the area. ‘No-man’s land’ thus became the land of the everyman, as Christianity gathered itself before reclaiming the peninsula, or so we are told by Sánchez-Albornoz’s supporters.²⁴

Here too, then, we encounter a point of difference with the historiography of other parts of the continent: our *dramatis personae* are not those who bestride the stage of Frankish or Anglo-Saxon historiography. In Spain, far from being central to the changing composition of early medieval society, the serf and the slave were thought to have played second fiddle to the free peasant proprietor, creating conditions considered by Sánchez-Albornoz to be unpropitious for the intense exploitation and violent lordly oppression characteristic of ‘feudal society’. These conditions, it was long held, made Spain ‘different’ from its European neighbours, and with good reason: in Iberia, free peasants, unencumbered by ties of feudal oppression, ‘populated’ the countryside, establishing new settlements here and there as kings laboured gamely to win the peninsula back from Islam. Divisions between public and private

²³ For an overview: see J. Escalona and I. Martín Viso, ‘The Life and Death of an Historiographical Folly: The Early Medieval Depopulation and Repopulation of the Duero Basin’, in S. Barton and R. Portass (eds), *Beyond the Reconquista: New Directions in the History of Medieval Iberia* (Leiden, forthcoming, 2018).

²⁴ This group counts Anglophone scholars among its number: see D. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London, 1978).

power and other issues of concern to scholars of, say, the Transformation of the Year 1000 (discussed in chapter XX), were largely marginalised until recent decades.

Only since the 1970s, before which time Spain endured (indeed, cultivated) scholarly isolation under the dictatorship of General Franco, has feudalism been reintroduced into academic discussion – thanks largely to the work of Abilio Barbero and Marcelo Vigil, and, after them, their mighty phalanx of followers.²⁵ Most of this work, unsurprisingly, has been undertaken by Spanish scholars writing in Spanish (that is, Castilian). Few can be mentioned here, but José Ángel García de Cortázar's work has been so influential as to merit some comment. Borrowing from a wider range of ideological influences than did Barbero and Vigil, this author's scope and ambition betray the influence of the great French historians Marc Bloch and Georges Duby, as well as that of an interesting assemblage of historical geographers, anthropologists and demographers. His principal contribution has been to introduce to regional history a more holistic approach that accounts for the effects of climate, geography, and resources and their distribution. Those likewise interested in what García de Cortázar has called the 'social organisation of space' have also taken their cue from a series of in-depth regional studies, mostly published between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s, almost always concerned with the proprietary business of major monasteries.²⁶

By the early 1980s, there was no turning back. The late Ángel Barrios's work tied together demographic and settlement studies with toponymical analysis (that is, the study of place names) to make a stirring case for the existence of a Spanish 'feudal society'.²⁷ But while Barbero and Vigil, committed Marxists, located the origins of feudalism in the decay of an old

²⁵ Their most important works: A. Barbero de Aguilera and M. Vigil Pascual, *Sobre los orígenes sociales de la reconquista* (Barcelona, 1974), and *La formación del feudalismo en la península ibérica* (Barcelona, 1978).

²⁶ See J. A. García de Cortázar, *El dominio del monasterio de San Millán de la Cogolla (siglos X al XIII): introducción a la historia rural de Castilla altomedieval* (Salamanca, 1969).

²⁷ A. Barrios García, 'Toponomástica e historia: notas sobre la despoblación en la zona meridional del Duero', *En la España Medieval* 2 (1982), 115-34.

order of kin-based, tribal social arrangements in the Spanish north, bypassing the Romano-Visigothic inheritance entirely (which they considered insubstantial anyway), historians writing since about 1980 have proposed that ‘feudalisation’ brought in its wake ‘a reorganisation of villages and a reorientation of the system of exploitation’.²⁸ Here one detects the influence of the scholarship of British Marxist historians, such as Perry Anderson, Rodney Hilton, and – more recently – Chris Wickham, which has inspired a great deal of work on seigneurial intrusion on peasant freedoms, and social relations more broadly.²⁹

This notwithstanding, persuasive syntheses of peninsular society in the round are few and far between. Among the most successful accounts of the Spanish early Middle Ages to be influenced by Barbero and Vigil are those which take an unusually ‘wide-lens’ approach to society and politics: Amancio Isla and Juanjo Larrea have offered exemplary accounts of opposite geographical poles of the peninsula, both focussing on an atypically broad range of actors (in accounts that have rather less time for the inevitable *telos* of History).³⁰ Carlos Estepa and others have traced the development of the institutions and modalities of lordship further into the Middle Ages, focussing on Castile, municipal councils and larger urban or proto-urban settlements.³¹ In recent years, interest in the emerging aristocracy of the early Middle Ages, particularly with regards to its role in the management of large estates, has extended to consider the role of women, some of them from the peripheries of the kingdom.³²

²⁸ I. Martín Viso and A. Barrios García, ‘Reflexiones sobre el poblamiento rural altomedieval en el norte de la península ibérica’, *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 18-19 (2000-2001), 53-83, at 61: ‘la intrusión del feudalismo supuso una reordenación de las villas y una reorientación del sistema de explotación.’

²⁹ R. Pastor de Togneri, *Resistencias y luchas campesinas en la época del crecimiento y consolidación de la formación feudal: Castilla y León, siglos X–XIII* (Madrid, 1980).

³⁰ A. Isla Frez, *La sociedad gallega en la alta edad media* (Madrid, 1992); J. Larrea, *La Navarre du I^{er} au XII^e siècle: peuplement et société* (Brussels, 1998). For analysis in English, see A. Isla Frez, ‘The aristocracy and the monarchy in northwest Iberia between the eighth and eleventh century’, in J. D’Emilio (ed.), *Culture and society in medieval Galicia* (Leiden, 2015), 251-80.

³¹ C. Estepa Díez, ‘El alfoz castellano en los siglos IX al XII’, *En la España Medieval* 4 (1984), 305-42.

³² M. C. Pallares Méndez, *Ilduara, una aristócrata del siglo X* (Sada, 1998).

The work of Barrios, Estepa *et al.* has influenced a younger generation of scholars that includes Iñaki Martín Viso and Julio Escalona Monge, who have looked to complement their insights with comparative analysis and new findings from archaeology, a burgeoning field in its own right since the 1990s.³³ The willingness of historians to look beyond the peninsula for enriching comparanda has also contributed to a rising interest in charter studies in Spain, which in many ways look to the concerns of a group of British scholars known as the Bucknell Group. Isabel Alfonso's work, for example, has focused on peasant-lord relations and judicial proceedings, two staples of the Bucknell Group's landmark publications; it builds upon foundations laid by Roger Collins in two important articles of the mid-1980s, but also shows the influence of French historical materialists.³⁴ Closer to home, the provision of justice has been subjected to comprehensive reappraisals (in English) by Wendy Davies too, whose work emphasises pattern and procedure, albeit tempered by regional practice, yet chooses to dispense with the inflexible categories of private and public procedure (this latter implying the involvement of the state or its agents), at least insofar as they are traditionally understood.³⁵

Yet striking to Anglophone scholars of Spain is the fact that almost all of the most stimulating work of recent decades on the Spanish early Middle Ages (say, the period before 1100) has focussed on socio-economic and spatial analyses of the rural environment, village settlements and monastic lordship; society, accordingly, has been glimpsed from the 'bottom up' rather than the 'top down'. Orthodox or conventional political history has been marginal

³³ The following particularly important contributions, all written in English, deserve mention: I. Martín Viso and S. Castellanos García, 'The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000)', *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (2005), 1–41; J. Escalona Monge, 'The early Castilian peasantry: an archaeological turn?', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 2 (2009), 119–45; J. A. Quirós Castillo (ed.), *Social Complexity in early Medieval Rural Communities: The North Western Iberia Archaeological Record* (Oxford, 2016).

³⁴ For an English-language contribution, see 'Judicial Rhetoric and Political Legitimation in Medieval León-Castile', in I. Alfonso, H. Kennedy and J. Escalona (eds), *Building Legitimacy: Political Discourses and Forms of Legitimacy in Medieval Societies* (Leiden, 2004), 51–87. For Collins's seminal contributions: 'Visigothic law and regional custom in disputes in early medieval Spain', in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds), *The settlement of disputes in early medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1992), 85–104, and 'Sicut lex Gothorum continet: law and charters in ninth- and tenth-century León and Catalonia', *English Historical Review* 100 (1985), 489–512.

³⁵ W. Davies, *Windows on Justice in northern Iberia, 800–1000* (Abingdon, 2016). Cf., on donation, eadem, *Acts of Giving* (Oxford, 2007).

to the concerns of the historians discussed here.³⁶ Indeed, what these approaches share is more important than what sets them apart, and one feature in particular is common to the vast majority of secondary literature written since 1970: a firm belief in the reality of feudal social relations as the defining element of the social formation. This is a concept now so firmly embedded in Spanish scholarship that it goes largely unquestioned.

What this rich cornucopia of interesting approaches to Spanish medieval history has done for our understanding of Spanish historical development is wholly positive; an unintended consequence, however, has been that the preoccupations of Spanish historians, working within their own national tradition, have been out of kilter with the concerns of scholars from other backgrounds. For example, that the emergence of the study of feudalism in Spain should have taken place at a time when historians working within other national and methodological traditions were attempting to jettison the concept is an irony that Peter Linehan has pointed out in his magnificent *History and the Historians of the Medieval Spain*, the starting point for Anglophone scholars of medieval Spain and its historiography.

Reaction to the political ideology of the *Franquista* establishment has been determined by the domestic and foreign consequences of political change. As entry into the European Community has lowered Spain's national barriers, the emergence from captivity of Spain's academic Marxists has hastened the medievalists in their headlong flight to feudalism.³⁷

This particular historiographical problem cannot be developed in detail here. For our purposes it remains crucial to recognise that in spite of the myriad studies undertaken on all manner of topics since the 1970s (of which only a flavour is given above), the ideological force of *Reconquista* and *Despoblación* has not been entirely overcome, even if its fundamental basis has been scrutinised. Objections to the paradigm propagated by Sánchez-Albornoz have taken

³⁶ British and American scholars have provided more of this: see Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*; B. F. Reilly, *The Medieval Spains* (Cambridge, 1993); J. F. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca, 1975).

³⁷ Linehan, *History and the Historians*, 191.

three main forms. First, there are those who take issue with Sánchez-Albornoz's rather literal reading of the major chronicles, in which latter we are told, for example, that the first wave of reconquest took place in the middle of the eighth century under Alfonso I (739-57), led to the capture of many cities (including Lugo, Tuy, Segovia and Porto), and saw Christians rescued and returned to 'their country' (*'ad patriam'*). Second, discussion has revolved around the meaning of a Latin word (*'populare'*) that appears in the chronicles in various forms: for some historians, Sánchez-Albornoz included, this word can only be taken to mean that areas of the peninsula were settled with newcomers – 'populated' indeed. Others have claimed that the range of meaning of the word is such that *'populare'* must indicate something more complex – a reorganisation of settlements and related demographic arrangements, as it were. Finally, archaeologists have argued since the 1980s that wholesale abandonment of settlements in the supposedly deserted frontier zone simply did not occur.³⁸ Current consensus is that Sánchez-Albornoz's depopulation thesis is flawed, but it continues to inform all discussions of the material.

The Caliphate and the Christian Kingdoms

The writing of the political history of early medieval Spain therefore finds itself at something of an impasse. But if *Reconquista* and *despoblación* are to be jettisoned, with what are we left? One thing that remains certain is that political relations between the kingdoms and counties of the Christian north and al-Andalus, while somewhat sporadic, were largely hostile. The Arabic and Latin sources leave no room for doubt in this regard. Ibn Ḥayyān (987-1076), our best source on early al-Andalus, for he compiled the writings of earlier historians (many of which have now been lost) into a detailed and more complex narrative (only some of which survives), provides numerous references to emiral and caliphal armies routing their Christian

³⁸ F. Reyes Téllez, *Población e sociedad en el valle del Duero. Duratón y Riaza en la alta edad media, siglos vi al xi: aspectos arqueológicos* (Madrid, 2001).

counterparts.³⁹ Yet when the armies of these polities met on the battlefield, it was rarely if ever because the emirs and (later) caliphs of al-Andalus held any designs on the conquest of the northern kingdoms: had they wished to engage in wholesale conquest, it is hard to see why they could not have brought this about. Other reasons suggest themselves when looking to explain the frequent hostility between Islam and Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula. Periods of internal unrest in Andalusi-controlled territory in the eighth and ninth centuries presented the Christians with many opportunities to mount raids beyond the Duero. In addition, the obligation felt by emirs to wage Holy War on the infidels to their north was an equally important causal factor, for some historians at least.⁴⁰ Other scholars afford scant significance to *jihad* when it comes to explaining the hostility shown by the Umayyads to the Christian polities of the peninsula, a position which, it must be stressed, is seemingly at odds with the general tenor of the surviving primary sources.⁴¹

Throughout its first two centuries Muslim Iberia was also plagued by frequent bouts of civil strife in the frontier regions. Cities such as Toledo and Zaragoza, although theoretically ruled by princelings subservient to Córdoba, were restless hotbeds of dissent.⁴² For example, when the inhabitants of Mérida defied Umayyad authority in 828, the leader of this unrest, Mahmud al-Jabbar, eventually fled to the Asturians, where he was welcomed for a time by Alfonso II (791-842).⁴³ The Banu Qasi, a family of powerful Muslim warlords in the Upper Ebro valley, despite suffering reverses at the hands of the emirate to which they were supposedly loyal, remained *in situ* and struck up a long-standing alliance with the royal house

³⁹ The text in question, the *Muḳtabis*, does not exist in English translation, but for a flavour of Ibn Hayyān's work see the indispensable Brill Encyclopaedia of Islam, an online reference work of great utility, available at: <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>.

⁴⁰ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 24-7; Kennedy, 'The Muslims in Europe', 267; Reilly, *The Medieval Spains*, 80.

⁴¹ Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered*, 10-11. Consider a poem of Ibn 'Abd Rabihi, in *Hispano-Arabic Poetry: a Student Anthology* (Piscataway, NJ, 2004 [orig. Los Angeles, 1974]), 74-129, at 88: 'For the purpose of the glorious Imam; the best of those begotten and the best begetter was/To take up the defence of the One, the Victorious, and to vent some of his anger upon the infidels'.

⁴² Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, ch. 1; O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 111-15.

⁴³ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 39-40.

of Navarre.⁴⁴ Even Córdoba suffered from insurrection, notably so in 818 when a mob marched on the emir's palace, resulting in harsh punitive measures which saw the entire suburb of Secunda razed to the ground.⁴⁵

Emiral authority in the frontier regions ebbed and flowed. Al-Hakam I (796-822) and Abd al Rahman II (822-52) both more or less managed to maintain some semblance of control; by contrast, from the time of Muhammad I (852-86) the emirate was starting to come apart at the seams, betokening a crisis of central power that lasted until the time of Abd al-Rahman III (912-61). For Collins, the travails of the emirate are best illustrated by the doings of Ibn Hafsun, a petty lord of the settlement of Bobastro (in the mountains near Málaga), who, during a long period from the 880s to the 920s, led emirs and sometime allies a merry dance, switching between the Christian and Muslim faiths while defying Umayyad authority as he saw fit.⁴⁶ Unlike almost everything else in the field, the degraded condition of the late ninth-century Andalusí state commands consensus. Kennedy has stated that 'in 886 the disintegration of the emirate was far advanced', and the pattern emerging here is perhaps best described as that of local government managing to throw off the shackles of Córdoba.

Some Asturian kings looked to capitalise: Ramiro I (842-50) and Ordoño I (850-66) enjoyed mixed fortunes in this regard, the former overseeing the construction of a striking series of palace buildings just outside his capital, the latter launching a series of raids on strategic targets.⁴⁷ It is also against this backdrop that Alfonso III (866-910) supposedly

⁴⁴ Collins, *ibid.*, ch. 1, throughout which numerous episodes are recounted wherein the Banu Qasi are shown to be a frequent thorn in the side of Córdoba. Cf. Kennedy's sagacious animadversions in 'The Muslims in Europe', 257, 266, 269, and the elegant reflections of R. Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (Berkeley, 2006 [orig. London, 1992]), 44-7.

⁴⁵ M. Makki, 'The Political History of al-Andalus (91/711-897/1492)', in S. K. Jayyusi (ed.), *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, 2nd edn, (2 vols., Leiden, 1994), I, 23-4; Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered*, 49; Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 34-6.

⁴⁶ Makki, 'The Political History', 31-4; Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 121-30. For an Arabic account of Ibn Hafsun's doings (in English translation), see Smith, *Christians and Moors*, vol. III, 32-7.

⁴⁷ A. Arbeiter and S. Noack-Haley, 'The Kingdom of Asturias', in *The Art of Medieval Spain: AD 500-1200* (New York, 1993), 113-20. On Christian kings: Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, ch. 2.

continued with the good work of his predecessors, undertaking to repopulate major centres with Christians, building many churches and palaces at his *sedes regia* in Oviedo.⁴⁸ But although known as ‘the Great’ to Spanish historians of yore, Alfonso III was fortunate to rule at perhaps the emirate’s lowest ebb, and yet still failed to make secure arrangements for a peaceful transition of power in his kingdom after his own death. Such considerations illustrate the need to consider the extent to which established historiographical touchstones influence our views to this day.

Fragmented political geography was the norm throughout the Spanish early Middle Ages. Territorial gains won from Islam between c.750 and c.950, including those of Alfonso III, were precariously held by the Christians, who were more often than not on the back foot throughout the tenth century, the internal politics of their kingdoms becoming messier and increasingly complex as the number of players with a stake in the game multiplied. It is not the intention of this chapter to provide a detailed account of these events, which in any case can be found in English elsewhere: let it suffice to say that the tenth century was characterised by an intense jockeying for position between western (Galician and Portuguese) and Leonese factions, the involvement of the ambitious comital dynasty of Castile muddying the waters still further.⁴⁹ Throw in some Navarrese meddling for good measure and the labyrinthine web of political ties that bound these polities together, and yet held them apart, emerges in outline.

Meanwhile, reformed and reinvigorated by Abd al Rahman III, from the 930s Córdoba was to enjoy its heyday as the preeminent power of tenth-century Europe, based on a more extensive and stringent fiscal regime and a markedly more aggressive and self-aggrandizing ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ policy.⁵⁰ The ideological force of this newly emboldened polity had

⁴⁸ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 76-82. Some of Alfonso III’s activity, narrated in the late ninth-century Christian chronicle tradition discussed below at p. XX, can be read in Smith, *Christians and Moors*, vol. I, 50-3.

⁴⁹ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, chs. 2 and 6.

⁵⁰ Described most succinctly in Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, ch. 4.

its roots in the events of 929, when Abd al Rahman III took the title of Caliph, possibly in response to the rise of a rival Muslim dynasty in North Africa, the Fatimids. By doing so, he effectively proclaimed himself the legitimate leader of global Islam. The Caliphate of Córdoba proceeded to revise its view of its northern neighbours in the last third of the tenth century: hitherto a distraction, the Christian kingdoms now became a target. So frequent and severe were the despoliations visited upon major settlements of the Christian kingdoms that at the turn of the millennium the Kingdom of Asturias-León faced extinction. The architect of Andalusí policy in the 980s and 990s was the Muslim warlord Al-Mansur. A wily and ruthless operator, he marginalised the rightful Caliph, Hisham II (976-1009 and 1010-1013), and consolidated his grip on power by elevating Berber allies at court.⁵¹ However, the ‘impression of strength was to prove illusory’, and in 1031 the Caliphate of Córdoba imploded in spectacular fashion, in part because of the damaging after-effects of Al-Mansur’s destructive and unruly antics, which had done much to undermine caliphal authority.⁵² What resulted was a patchwork of Islamic city-states, known as *Ta’ifa*, each now vulnerable to the predations of Christian kings eager to foment unrest between and among these micro-kingdoms while simultaneously extorting their rulers.⁵³

The Caliphate’s demise of course involved willing Christian schemers too, with several Leonese kings raking in vast quantities of Andalusí protection money (called *parias* in the sources). Matters came to a head early in the eleventh century when Ferdinand, Count of Castile, absorbed the Kingdom of León into his domains, adjoining it with Castile (with which he was linked thanks to the conquests and able politicking of his father, Sancho the Great of

⁵¹ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 185-95; H. Kennedy, ‘Sicily and al-Andalus under Muslim Rule’, in T. Reuter (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. III, c. 900-c.1024*, 646-69, at 653-7.

⁵² Barton, ‘Spain in the Eleventh Century’, in D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith (eds), *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. IV/Part II, c.1024-c.1198*, 154-90, at 154.

⁵³ Ibid. *passim*; Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, ch. 6; and, classically, D. Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002-1086* (Princeton, 1985).

Navarre (1004-35)).⁵⁴ He did this in 1037 by defeating King Vermudo III of León (1028-37), subduing the support that the latter enjoyed in Galicia.⁵⁵ These events precipitated further significant changes for the future course of Spanish history: the western realm of Galicia would henceforth be marginal to events beyond its borders, and from the ashes of Navarre would emerge a series of small polities, the most important of which, Aragón, would go on to become a Mediterranean power in the later Middle Ages.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the messy factional politics that led to Ferdinand's taking of the throne should not blind us to the reality of his power, neatly distilled by a contemporary, his half-brother Ramiro I of Aragón (1035-63), who described him as '*imperator in Castella, et in Leone, et in Astorga*' – emperor in Castile, León and Astorga.⁵⁷

Thereafter the increasing confidence and assertiveness of the Christian kings emerge with clarity in our sources, the early twelfth-century *Historia Silense* telling of how in 1063 Fernando I oversaw the translation to León of the relics of Isidore of Seville, a famous Catholic bishop and intellectual from the Visigothic age.⁵⁸ In 1080 the Council of Burgos decreed that the Roman liturgy be adopted by the Spanish Church, bringing Spain further within the cultural orbit of the rest of Latin Christendom.⁵⁹ Thus, by the second half of the eleventh century the tables had turned decisively in the Christians' favour, so much so, in fact, that Alfonso VI (1065-1109), king of the powerful united domains of León and Castile, retook Toledo in 1085.

⁵⁴ R. Collins, *The Basques* (Oxford, 1986), ch. 4; idem, *Caliphs and Kings*, 205-13.

⁵⁵ Barton, 'Spain in the Eleventh Century', 163.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁷ H. Sirantoine, *Imperator Hispaniae: Les Idéologies Impériales dans le Royaume de León (IXe-XIIe siècles)* (Madrid, 2013), 159.

⁵⁸ The *Silense*, thought to have been composed at or near to León, is a complex miscellany of earlier texts and 'original' sections. It is our major source for the events of the eleventh century in the Kingdom of León and can be consulted in S. Barton and R. Fletcher (transl.), *The World of El Cid: Chronicles of the Spanish Reconquest* (Manchester, 2000), 24-64. The translation of Isidore's relics: 58-9.

⁵⁹ T. F. Ruiz, 'Burgos and the Council of 1080', in his *The City and the Realm: Burgos and Castile, 1080-1492* (Aldershot 1992), 121-30.

This city had been the ancient capital of the Visigoths, and its reconquest must therefore be considered an act charged with symbolism for contemporaries and later historians alike.⁶⁰

And yet still political stability proved elusive. In 1086 Christian momentum was checked at the Battle of Sagrajas, at which the Berber army of the austere fundamentalist dynasty of the Almoravids, freshly arrived in the peninsula from North Africa, achieved a decisive victory.⁶¹ Having been summoned by *Ta'ifa* princes, these latter alarmed by the newfound strength of their Christian foes, the Almoravids seized the opportunity to promote their altogether more forbidding brand of Islam. To use Reilly's famous formulation, the 'contest of Christian and Muslim Spain' was entering a new, destructive phase.⁶² In 1100 neither Alfonso VI nor the Almoravid prince Yusuf Ibn Tashfin could claim hegemony in the peninsula in spite of an ideological hardening of their respective positions. What, then, had changed? The Europe of the Carolingians, with which we began, had turned into that of the Crusades: but while for some the dawn of the twelfth century would mark the 'Making of Europe', no such common purpose was to be found among the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula.⁶³ Spain therefore offers us an interesting test case to set alongside developments mapped out elsewhere in this volume. If nothing else, by looking at Spain, and not just the 'usual suspects' of Anglo-Saxon England and post-Roman Francia, we oblige ourselves to acknowledge the diverse paths taken by the major polities of Western Europe in these crucial centuries. To shed further light on some of the matters raised thus far, Spanish developments are explored in what follows under the following themes: governmentality; and religiosity and identity.

⁶⁰ On Alfonso VI the standard English-language work is B. F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under Alfonso VI* (Princeton, 1999).

⁶¹ O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 209; Barton, 'Spain in the Eleventh Century', 182.

⁶² B. F. Reilly, *The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain, 1031-1157* (Oxford, 1992).

⁶³ R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (London, 1993).

GOVERNMENTALITY

The Kingdoms of Asturias and León

The study of government has been central to historical scholarship on early medieval Europe – one thinks, especially, of Anglo-Saxon England and the Carolingian and Ottonian realms, explored in depth in chapters XX and XX.⁶⁴ However, government and governmentality have been rather less prominent features of the historiography of Christian Spain, which has been more concerned with, on the one hand, rather dry legal and institutional history, and, on the other, meta-historical questions related to Spanish identity (discussed below).⁶⁵ In large part this is because so little can be said with any certainty about the nuts and bolts of governing. So while we know from a group of early charters and a cycle of slightly later royal chronicles that in 800 the kings of Asturias ruled from their capital in Oviedo, sporadically launching raids on contested territories to their south, we can say rather less about how they held their kingdoms together and made their voices heard.

By 1100 we are on firmer ground, largely thanks to a significant number of surviving charters (title-deeds/legal records), which for the tenth century alone number more than 10,000 for Christian Spain, some 7,000 of these from Catalonia. These documents provide a wealth of information on several aspects of the society of the day: social relations, lordship, transaction and economic matters, literacy, dispute settlement and legal culture. Caution needs to be taken, however, before accepting their contents wholesale: many of these documents survive precisely because they are records of the landed wealth of the institutions (monasteries, cathedrals) in whose archives they came to rest. There is also the question of authenticity to take into account,

⁶⁴ Consider the debate surrounding the ‘maximalist’ estimations of the Anglo-Saxon state’s capabilities and reach, discussed, along with references to pertinent secondary literature, in G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), passim.

⁶⁵ A useful introduction for students, if now a little dated, is L. G de Valdeavellano, *Curso de Historia de las Instituciones españolas: De los orígenes al final de la Edad Media* (Madrid, 2008 [orig. 1968]), 405-6.

for legal documents are in some sense instruments of power, conveying or conferring ownership of land or political competencies (sometimes both), and are therefore liable to interpolation or forgery. Another problem to consider is that few of these documents survive in their original form, the majority now copied into twelfth- and thirteenth-century compilations of legal records known as cartularies. Nonetheless, while historians argue about the relative merits of charters, all agree that they indispensable to any serious study of Christian Iberia in the Middle Ages.⁶⁶

To know something about government in this period we rely on charters issued by kings and their agents. These documents tell of royal attempts to appoint supporters in areas beyond the immediate reach of the king's court, to cultivate networks of mutual advantage by means of marriage alliance and *quid pro quo* arrangements with those deemed worthy (or too powerful to ignore), and to confiscate land from upstarts who would defy kingly authority. The earliest royal charter dates to 775 and was issued by King Silo (774-83) but it is really only after 900 that we begin to see significant numbers of charters that convey information on government. Although these documents are hugely informative, it would be wrong to equate literacy with government in this period, as if the latter were impossible without large numbers of scribes and the existence of something resembling a royal chancery. Kings had other means of winning support at their disposal, as we have seen, and were successful at bringing the aristocracies of the powerful Navarrese, Galician and Castilian regions into the fold (see map XX). Nonetheless, that numbers of documents begin to rise dramatically from around 900 probably indicates that this was a society increasingly cognisant of the utility of the written word for business of all sorts – commercial, legal and governmental.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ G. Barrett, 'The Written and the World in Early Medieval Iberia', DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2015.

⁶⁷ On charters and literacy see Barrett, 'The Written and the World'; cf., for a geographically broader treatment, W. C. Brown, M. Costambeys, M. Innes and A. J. Kosto (eds), *Documentary Culture and the Laity in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2012).

How, though, was the kingdom organised in structural or administrative terms? The most pressing task facing Christian kings was that of persuading the frontier aristocracies to submit to their authority and to enjoy the privileges that doing so would bring. To delegate authority to regional factions in this way brought with it myriad dangers: to fail to reward powerful individuals adequately was to risk losing their support; at the same time, to reward them too generously was to run the risk that they might soon eclipse the royal host. This task of persuasion, made more complex by the limited technologies and means of transportation of the period, was also hindered by the geographical realities of the peninsula. The northern third of the peninsula, which played host to all of the major Christian kingdoms of the early Middle Ages, is, by turns, wet, green and hilly in the west, mountainous and sparsely populated in the centre-north, and flat, inhospitable and prone to extremes of temperature in the Duero basin. This is not to mention the Mediterranean climate and geography of Catalonia, which region, furthermore, was also drawn into the world of Frankish politics, Gerona and Barcelona falling to the Franks in 785 and 801 respectively.⁶⁸

Given the scale of these challenges, that any kind of government was possible in early medieval Christian Spain is remarkable, but possible it indeed was. This much is clear from records of councils attended by the leading magnates of the realm, some of which have survived. These documents describe the congregation of important political operators at assemblies, sometimes under the king's command: for example, recounting a bracingly direct instance of royal intervention from 1012, Alfonso V tells of how his father, Vermudo II, used just such an occasion to engage in public consultation of the law before confiscating the

⁶⁸ Throughout the ninth century the counts of Barcelona operated to all intents and purposes as an independent power, exercising authority over or indeed swallowing up smaller Catalan counties. The political culture of Catalonia, known to the Franks as the *Marca Hispanica* (or Spanish March), remained resolutely Frankish in character, and counts indeed looked to Frankish, and not Asturian or Leonese, kings for royal approval of their assumption of office. The administration and application of justice in these counties, at least in these documents, has a markedly public character, again of a distinctly Frankish hue. This reality helps to explain why primarily Francophone debates such as that of the Feudal Revolution, **discussed in chapter XX**, have been important among scholars of Catalonia too. For these reasons Catalonia is not dealt with here.

possessions of disloyal subjects.⁶⁹ Furthermore, charters demonstrate the (at least theoretical) division of parts of the realm into administrative precincts known variously as *comitatus*, *commissos* and *mandationes*, although we do not know precisely what sort of administrative, fiscal or policing duties were expected of those responsible for their upkeep. These units were more often than not associated with a great magnate of the kingdom, though not always with those individuals who bore the title of count (*comes* in Latin). How these units took shape, whether they reflect the imposition of the king's will or were of local design, and quite who was responsible for deciding who might be titled 'count', we cannot know. Certainly, counts appear sporadically in early contexts, although the sources in which these references appear are normally later copies of charters or chronicles written after about 880.⁷⁰

For Sánchez-Albornoz, kings were the crucial figures, the ability to delegate authority falling squarely within their gift; named individuals at the head of territorial divisions such as *comitatus*, *commissa* and *mandationes* were in some sense therefore 'agents of the crown'. Others have challenged or at least nuanced this view, which allows for a relatively high degree of 'public power', by stressing that negotiation rather than the overweening might of royal majesty must have been central to the development of administrative apparatus in the early Middle Ages.⁷¹ So while some are impressed by the public power of the Astur-Leonese

⁶⁹ Document number 90 in J. A. Fernández Flórez and M. Herrero de la Fuente, *Colección documental del monasterio de Santa María de Otero de la Dueñas, I, 854-1108* (León, 1999).

⁷⁰ More than one count is said to have been active in the mid-ninth century, according to the late ninth-century *Chronicle of Albelda*, discussed below on p. X. Of these accounts, descriptions such as '*comes in Alaba*', a role, according to the chronicler, performed by Vela Jiménez in 882, seem to leave little room for doubt. For the reference see *Chronica Adefonsi tertii regis*, ed. J. Gil Fernández, J. L. Moralejo and J. I. Ruiz de la Peña, in *Crónicas asturianas: Crónica de Alfonso III (Rotense y 'a Sebastián') y Crónica albeldense (y 'profética')* (Oviedo, 1985), 178 (Latin)/252 (Spanish). The 'Rotense' or 'Roda' version has been translated in Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, 129-43. An early example of comital business, in which a count was apparently dispatched to represent the king at a dispute in Galicia, dates to 818 and can be found in A. C. Floriano (ed.), *Diplomática española del período astur: estudio de las fuentes documentales del reino de Asturias (718-910)* (2 vols., Oviedo, 1949-51): the charter in question is number 28. Ninth-century counts are also mentioned in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, also discussed below at p. XX.

⁷¹ Two landmark articles on this subject are: C. Sánchez-Albornoz, 'Commissa, comitatus, mandationes', in *Studi storici in onore di Ottirino Bertolini* (Pisa, 1972), 619-55; and idem, 'Imperantes y potestates en el reino asturleonés', *Cuadernos de Historia de España* xlv-xlvi (1967), 352-73.

kingdom, others consider a high estimation of its reach and capabilities to be unrealistic, and choose to stress the malleability and fragility of the interpersonal relations that underpinned all interaction between kings and their greater subjects.⁷² Some historians have even taken inspiration from further afield, seeing the fission that afflicted Frankish public power from c.900, and the resulting emergence of private lordship, as a model for Spanish developments.⁷³

Kings of course made enemies, for they could not dispense their favour in equal measure throughout their realm. There is some evidence that important aristocrats were charged with assisting the king in bringing to justice those who had become, in the colourful idiom of the sources, ‘puffed up with pride and driven by malice’, a sorry state that led these misguided souls to challenge royal authority.⁷⁴ The Galician aristocracy, parts of which were extremely closely tied to the royal family, helped in this ‘mopping up’ process, notably so as early as the 870s, when a certain Hermenegild helped Alfonso III to convince Duke Witiza of the error of his ways.⁷⁵ This same family helps us to see the *commissos* and *mandationes* at work because at least two successive generations were given responsibility for governing large swathes of central-southern Galicia in the tenth century.⁷⁶ There is some indication that these privileges brought genuine material advantage as well as prestige: a charter from 949 shows that kings sometimes conceded the right to collect tax to their followers; in 944, royal largesse

⁷² See A. Castro Carvajal, ‘The Monarchy and the Elites in Early Medieval León’, *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 7/2 (2015), 232-48; R. Portass, ‘All Quiet on the Western Front? Royal Politics in Galicia from c.800 to c. 900’, *Early Medieval Europe* 21/3 (2013), 283-306.

⁷³ See J. M. Mínguez Fernández, ‘Ruptura social e implantación del feudalismo en el noroeste peninsular (siglos viii–x)’, *Studia Historica Historia Medieval* 3 (1985), 7-32. A major influence at work here is that of Pierre Bonnassie’s work on Catalonia.

⁷⁴ ‘*Superbia elatus et spiritu malicie ductus*’ is how a charter from Celanova describes the rebellious conduct of Suero Gundemariz against Vermudo II (982-99). This example, document number 221, comes from E. Sáez and C. Sáez (eds), *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Celanova (842–1230)*, I: (842–942); II: (943–988); III: (989–1006) (Alcalá de Henares, 1996, 2000, 2006).

⁷⁵ An episode recounted with admirable clarity in Isla Frez, ‘The Aristocracy and the Monarchy’, 251-80 at 256-8.

⁷⁶ The family in question is that of Gutier Menéndez; for a recent appraisal of its role in governing parts of Galicia, see R. Portass, *The Village World of Early Medieval Northern Spain: Local Community and the Land Market* (Woodbridge, 2017), ch. 8. It should be noted that the aristocracy of north-western Iberia in the early Middle Ages held land in and influence over large swathes of what are now the Spanish autonomous region of Galicia and the kingdom (now Republic) of Portugal to its south; to impose a distinction between the two regions would indeed be anachronistic.

was extended such that the monastery of Celanova was awarded fishing rights in a local river.⁷⁷ Other examples of willing partners of the royal enterprise could be adduced from elsewhere but it does seem that the Galician/Portuguese magnate class was unusually prominent in these endeavours in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Their dominance was challenged by Castile from about 930, whose counts proved to be capricious allies of the kings of León for the next hundred years. After about 1030 Castile and León emerged as the twin lodestars of the Christian realms, a reality that has profoundly influenced the shape of the historiography. The later imposition of the Castilian language (known outside Spain as ‘Spanish’), and the political weight of the region after the eleventh century, means that the tenth-century count Fernán González and the eleventh-century mercenary Rodrigo Díaz, known as El Cid, have assumed legendary status – proto founding-fathers for some, perhaps, but able political schemers of the first rank too, motivated largely by self-interest, and prepared to fight for the highest (or most expedient) bidder, be he Christian or Muslim.⁷⁸

What sort of resources kings were able to mobilise in this period remains largely unknown. The signs are, however, that the extent of these resources has been somewhat underplayed by the historiography, since without significant wealth, technical expertise and cultural capital, it is hard to imagine how the royal palace complex, bath house and churches at Naranco, just outside Oviedo, could have been built as early as the mid-ninth century. That these buildings were clearly a major endeavour is clear not just from their fineness and location atop a hill outside the royal city, but also from their appearance in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*.⁷⁹ Alfonso the Great also turned his hand to the memorialisation of his achievements in stone, building a series of churches, some of which seem to have been influenced by Byzantine

⁷⁷ These examples are numbers 177 and 85 in Sáez and Sáez, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Celanova*.

⁷⁸ A short and informative guide in English is Joseph O’Callaghan’s entry on ‘Castile, County and Kingdom’ in M. Gerli (ed.), *Medieval Iberia: an Encyclopedia* (New York, 2003), 209-10. Cf. Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, ch. 9. See also R. Fletcher, *The Quest for El Cid* (London, 1989).

⁷⁹ Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, 175.

designs, hinting at a flow of cultural currents that may surprise.⁸⁰ Quite why these endeavours must remain so enigmatic has to do with another problem faced by the historians of the northern Spanish kingdoms (west of Catalonia): to our knowledge kings did not mint coins in these areas until the reign of Alfonso VI (1065-1109), which absence significantly complicates our understanding of the social and economic history of these realms. Compare this reality with the signal importance attached to the royal control of the minting of coins in Anglo-Saxon England, both by the kings of that state and later historians.⁸¹

Coins or no coins, all kings relied on the effective deployment of the rhetoric of power. This meant that kings had to draw upon biblical notions that saw royalty as in some way linked to the provision of justice.⁸² More prosaic realities, as ever, demanded compromise, and here again the king needed to bestow decision-making responsibilities on his trusted supports, for he could not be everywhere at once. The capital at León was the scene for the most serious judicial business in which kings were directly involved, but it is also clear that a wide range of other individuals ran courts, many but not all of whom were serious political players, at least in their regions. And in whose name did these individuals indeed act? Historians continue to argue about the degree to which such justice represented the ‘public’ voice of the kingdom, inspired by late Roman and Visigothic precedent and embodied by the court officers (the *saio* and *notarius*) of our documents, functionaries responsible for implementing the *Forum Iudicum* (or Visigothic Law). On the other hand, for some scholars, the late tenth century saw the emergence of the ‘private’ interests of a class of lords bound by no sense of public duty and motivated by an increasing desire to do as it wished, pocketing the profits of judicial procedure in the process. The foregoing is a caricature of the two extremes of this debate, but not much of one; most historians, as is perhaps to be expected, situate themselves somewhere in between

⁸⁰ All of these churches are discussed in Arbeiter and Noack-Haley, ‘The Kingdom of Asturias’.

⁸¹ Molyneux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom*, 116-40.

⁸² Proverbs 8:15: ‘By me kings reign, and princes decree justice’.

these poles.⁸³ Significant here, though, is some recognition of a Spanish historiographical debate touching base with one which has been of huge import to scholars of the Frankish kingdoms. By way of summary we might say that ‘public’ and ‘private’ conceptions of power now find themselves at a curious stalemate, participants on all sides of the debate in its Spanish context perhaps recognising that the terms cause as many problems as they solve.

Court-holding is certainly well evidenced in the charter material, and Wendy Davies, building on crucial work by Spanish historians, has shown that a sense of the public certainly survived into the ninth and tenth centuries, if by that we mean standardised judicial procedure marked by a relatively high degree of homogeneity across the Christian realms of the peninsula.⁸⁴ And while references to the law are frequently found in our charters, these same references reinforce another striking feature of Spanish developments: nothing which can straightforwardly be described as a ‘legal code’ was promulgated in the period from 800 to 1100. Rather, in the survival and continued use of the Visigothic Law we see a remarkably conservative cast of mind among the jurists, intellectuals and power-brokers of early medieval Spain. Where novelty did emerge it did so with a distinctly ‘local’ flavour. The increasing ubiquity of the *fuero*, a type of municipal charter that listed the rules governing a particular settlement, often with surprising sensitivity to local concerns, must be taken to reflect the political weight of local traditions.⁸⁵ Many settlements were granted *fueros* throughout the Middle Ages, but the most significant one of all is the *Fuero de León* of 1017.⁸⁶ This document, the official ‘record’ of a royal assembly held by Alfonso V and his magnates, discloses a series of strikingly practical provisions, some of which are devoted to the municipal government of the city of León itself, by this stage the largest city and political centre of the kingdom. Still,

⁸³ By far the most lucid account in English on justice and its workings is Davies, *Windows on Justice*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Reilly, *The Medieval Spains*, 120-1; J. Powers, ‘Fueros, Castilian’, in Gerli, *Medieval Iberia*, 344-6; Collins, ‘The Spanish Kingdoms’, 686; *idem*, *Caliphs and Kings*, 240.

⁸⁶ A. García Gallo, ‘El Fuero de León. Su historia, textos y redacciones’, *Anuario de la Historia del Derecho Español* 39 (1969), 5-171.

the imposition of legislative homogeneity throughout Christian Spain remained a distant dream. Castile, for example, was governed by its own laws until the thirteenth century.

Apart from charters our major source on matters of government and politics is the cycle of chronicles associated with the court of Alfonso III (866-910). The most well-known of these chronicles survives in two different versions: both are known by the generic title of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* and provide an account of political events in the peninsula from the seventh century to the death of Alfonso's father, Ordoño I (850-866).⁸⁷ In addition historians can look to the much more complicated *Chronicle of Albelda*, written about 881, the contents of which begin with the Creation, include various king-lists, excurses on all sorts of other matters (including material on Islamic history in some manuscripts), and a prophecy attributed to the biblical figure Ezekiel, in which the imminent end of Islamic Spain is foretold.⁸⁸ These chronicles are vital sources for the reconstruction of the history of Spain from the Islamic conquest up to the beginning of the reign of Alfonso III. Their place and date of composition means, however, that while they purport to offer a history of events before Alfonso III began to reign, the chronicles instead provide 'the official line' on that history as it was around about the year 900.

By the same token, charters and chronicles from the eleventh century do not suggest that government was markedly more sophisticated in this period than it had been in the tenth century: assembly politics dominated, and, in keeping with developments documented elsewhere in the decades around 1100, kings began to impose a wider range of tolls and imposts on their subjects, while something akin to a royal chancery took shape. Attempts to incorporate more lands within the jurisdiction of the royal fisc, although a staple of the secondary literature,

⁸⁷ See *Chronica Adefonsi tertii regis*, sections of which have been translated in Smith, *Christians and Moors*, vol. I, 50-3.

⁸⁸ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 52-5.

are not a prominent feature of the surviving primary materials until the very end of our period, which also saw the establishment of royal mints in major urban centres. Of more significance, assuredly, were the enormous sums paid to Christian lords by *taifa* rulers, for these payments laid bare the reality of Muslim debility in the middle of the eleventh century. Finding themselves in the ascendant, the king's closest advisers would come to form a semi-official consultative body by the year 1100 known as the *curia regis*, but how and in what ways this differed from the *aula regia* of centuries past is not entirely clear. In sum, the challenge of government in early medieval Christian Spain presented kings with the same kind of balancing act that all medieval rulers faced; but whereas Charlemagne could reward followers with near-limitless supplies of booty, face them down at the Marchfield, and remind them of their duties via capitularies, the kings of Asturias-León had to make do and mend with a more skeletal governmental apparatus.

Al-Andalus

The historiography of the government of al-Andalus has in general been much less contentious than that of the Christian north. Save for a few erudite but fundamentally mistaken attempts (not worth citing here) to deny that the Arab conquest ever took place, there exists consensus among historians when it comes to the reality of the conquest and its far-reaching effects on the peninsula. Healthy debate has existed, however, when it comes to locating the decades in which the rulers of Muslim Spain managed to make their presence felt beyond Córdoba, as well as the methods by which they did so; in other words, historians argue over whether the Muslim powers achieved notable wealth and political dominance during the emiral or caliphal period. The 'maximalist' approach of Acién and Manzano, Hitchcocks, and Makki, sees a highly efficient, tax-raising polity in place as early as the late eighth century; others, Kennedy, Collins and Wickham among their number, have pushed this date back to the tenth century, effectively conferring upon al-Andalus a short window of some fifty years or so of splendour

(c.930 to c.980).⁸⁹ Related to this debate has been another which centres on resources, population and acculturation: in other words, it asks how wide-spread were Arabic and Islamic influence in the peninsula, particularly after Abd al-Rahman I's arrival in Spain in 756. In a similar vein, it is instructive to consider how quickly the existing population converted to Islam, taking on the manners, mores, codes of conduct and speech, of the conquerors. These questions are best discussed in later sections of this chapter, for they touch on questions of identity and religion.

The issue of resources is a different matter, for these were (and remain) crucial to all ambitious governing classes. Evidence for tax-raising is relatively abundant, if anecdotal, being mentioned in passing by many major sources, including some Christian ones; noteworthy in this regard is the very early mention in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, which has it that in the immediate aftermath of the conquest the subject peoples paid tax 'to the king of Babylon'.⁹⁰ These exactions perhaps underwrote the Great Mosque of Córdoba, the earliest sections of which date to the 780s, and represent, for Hitchcock, an attempt to create 'a monument...a lasting emblem of the Umayyad dynasty'.⁹¹ Acién and Manzano are certainly impressed by the emirate's structural sophistication from an early date, and, furthermore, they have identified a number of defining attributes of the fiscal system: one such was the significant role played by the *aynād* army units as tax-collectors, a task they performed in exchange for exemption from the tithe.⁹² The emiral state also imposed a range of specialist taxes (one specifically for hunting with falcons, for example).⁹³ Yet it was non-Muslims who played a more crucial role

⁸⁹ M. Acién Almansa and E. Manzano Moreno, 'Organización social y administración política en al-Andalus bajo el emirato', *Territorio, Sociedad y Poder* Anejo 2 (2009), 331-48; Hitchcocks, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered*, ch. 2; Makki, 'The Political History', 24-31. Cf. Kennedy, 'The Muslims in Europe', 261, 271; Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 26; C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A history of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London, 2009), 339-44.

⁹⁰ Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, 133.

⁹¹ Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered*, 44.

⁹² Acién and Manzano, 'Organización', 335-6; Manzano, 'The Settlement and Organisation', 87-91.

⁹³ Kennedy, 'The Muslims in Europe', 264.

in bolstering the state's coffers, for Muslims were exempt from paying the capitation tax demanded of Jews and Christians (the *jizya*). This exaction must have provided a steady stream of revenue, whatever it might say about the nature of the protection offered to 'protected peoples'.

A few turning points with regard to structural complexity can also be identified. Abd al-Rahman II, for example, was clearly an organiser, interested in firming up the fiscal foundations of the state. Under his rule, it would appear that departments of state concerned themselves with a full range of administrative tasks, common to all of them the appropriate disbursement of public revenues.⁹⁴ Ministries were consolidated, and favoured officials, at first almost entirely of Arab ethnicity, were given charge of running the treasury, ensuring security and maintaining public works.⁹⁵ Abd al Rahman II's efforts also saw to the increased production of silver dirhams (coins) and during his reign further spending on building projects in Córdoba saw the physical footprint of the city grow.⁹⁶ Tax receipts, according to our sources, came rolling in: gross income increased from 600,000 dinars under al-Hakam to 1,000,000 under Abd al-Rahman II.⁹⁷ This latter's more famous namesake, Abd al-Rahman III, is rightly recognised as the architect of the more expansionist and intrusive fiscal policies of the tenth-century state. These policies saw the minting of gold coins in al-Andalus for the first time since the initial phase of the conquest, in addition to the more assiduous collection of taxation among the formerly recalcitrant tax-payers of the frontier districts. The rewards on offer for successful civil servants were obvious enough, and this world of favours and nepotism likely rested upon an honorific hierarchy. The office of the governorship of the mint, for example,

⁹⁴ O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 138-42;

⁹⁵ Makki, 'The Political History', 24.

⁹⁶ Manzano, *Conquistadores*, 252-5 and 293-311.

⁹⁷ Kennedy, 'The Muslims in Europe', 265, quoting Ibn Hayyan.

was one of several important staging-posts in the career of any individual who aspired to have genuine influence at the top of emiral or caliphal government.

Other crucial persons among the state's office-holding elite were judges, who heard petitions and dispensed justice within the Muslim communities of the major cities. A judge (*qādī*) wielded considerable power in this society, since he was necessarily learned in the traditions and scholarship of Islamic law, which derived its authority ultimately from the Quran. From the middle of the ninth century the rather severe branch of Mālikī law was dominant in al-Andalus, all of which reminds us that the Umayyad state was traditionalist in its religious and ideological outlook. Ideology should indeed be afforded its due weight, particularly after Abd al-Rahman III grasped the nettle in 929, declaring himself – as Caliph – the rightful leader of the Islamic world.⁹⁸ This sort of public pronouncement, together with the elaborate ceremonial and court culture cultivated during this period, some of it doubtless deployed to bamboozle visiting flunkies at the astonishingly opulent caliphal palace at Madinat al-Zahra, were designed to build upon the widespread Arabisation of society in the south.⁹⁹ The dissemination of the Arabic language and Arabic customs were truly significant, for they were mechanisms of social control: just as the lingua franca of Latin was a *sine qua non* for administrators in the Roman world, all would-be holders of bureaucratic or governmental roles in al-Andalus knew that acquaintance with Arabic was indispensable to their prospects.

The tangible underpinnings of Andalusī prosperity in the tenth century have also been explored. Some historians draw our attention to the 'extended and flourishing new agriculture in the countryside', which, together with a huge upsurge in the volume of trade, much of it via the ports of North Africa and the Caravan Route, formed the basis of Córdoba's increased

⁹⁸ Reilly, *The Medieval Spains*, 85. The most sophisticated study of these matters: J. Safran, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate: the Articulation of Caliphal Legitimacy in al-Andalus* (Cambridge 2000).

⁹⁹ Certain elements of Umayyad diplomatic culture are described to us, with extreme distaste, in an account of the visit to Córdoba made by the ambassador of Otto I, John of Gorze, in Smith, *Christians and Moors*, vol. I, 62-75.

prosperity.¹⁰⁰ Yet not all scholars imagine the supposed agrarian revolution of Umayyad Spain, a hypothesis associated with a landmark article of 1978, to have been all that revolutionary.¹⁰¹ How else to consolidate the pillars of state authority? Rather more grimly, but with a firm basis in the primary sources, Collins notes that spectacular acts of retributory violence shored up the Umayyad polity; Kennedy offers a similar argument, noting that a dogged commitment to *jihad* fed Al-Mansur's motivations from the 980s.¹⁰² What mattered was to choreograph acts of violence and displays of clemency to the ruler's advantage: Safran has shown how the caliph could indeed reveal himself to be the 'deputy of God' by vanquishing foes, before subjecting enemies to ceremonies of submission.¹⁰³

The outline of governmental infrastructure beyond the capital is hard to discern. Most tax, however much of it there really was, was channelled towards the capital, but some of it must have been spent on the construction of fortresses in the periphery and the provisioning of armies; however, that most of it was lavished on Córdoba likely explains why the frontier zones seemed so reluctant to do the emir or caliph's bidding, with Mérida, Toledo and the Upper March offering spirited resistance in the face of central overtures at various times throughout the eighth and ninth centuries. The Upper March (*al-Ṭagr al-A'lā*) was the name given to a region based around the administrative centre of Zaragoza, an old Roman city. It was one of three frontier districts, creating 'a diagonal extending from the mouth of the Tagus to that of the Ebro'; Mérida was the capital of the Lower March (*al-Ṭagr al-Adna*), and Toledo that of the Central March (*al-Ṭagr al-Aswat*).¹⁰⁴ Marches were split into provinces, each known as a

¹⁰⁰ Reilly, *The Medieval Spains*, 62; O. Remie Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹⁰¹ Manzano, *Conquerors*, 298, takes issue with the conclusions of Andrew M. Watson, 'The Arab Agricultural Revolution and its Diffusion, 700-1100', *Journal of Economic History* 34 (1974), 8-35. Balanced introductions to these matters are T. F. Glick, 'Hydraulic Technology in al-Andalus', and E. García Sánchez, 'Agriculture in Muslim Spain', in Jayyusi, *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, 974-88, and 987-99, respectively.

¹⁰² Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 36; Kennedy, 'Sicily and al-Andalus', 654.

¹⁰³ J. Safran, 'Ceremony and Submission: The Symbolic Representation and Recognition of Legitimacy in Tenth-Century al-Andalus', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 58 (1999), 191-201, at 201.

¹⁰⁴ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 27.

kura, to each of which was appointed a governor. Major urban centres, where governors were based, were crucial way stations *en route* to the Christian territories – stepping stones to a world at once more savage and less capably policed by the policy-makers of Córdoba.

There are excellent reasons to doubt the ability of pre-tenth-century emirs to control the frontiers of their state. Like their Christian counterparts in the north, they were hindered by the peninsula's geography, and to persuade frontier aristocracies in, say, Toledo or Zaragoza, that their taxes would be well spent in Córdoba was a hard sell. Complex networks of alliances between Christians and Muslims, allegiances shifting as the moment dictated, characterise the politics and government of these centuries. The frontier was by no means a border zone as we would understand that term today. It was something altogether more porous – the site of diplomatic, socio-cultural and economic encounters of every kind.¹⁰⁵ Those responsible for policing the frontier took advantage of the political elasticity it offered. For example, Musa b. Musa, of the remarkable Banu Qasi dynasty, based in the Upper Ebro valley and effectively independent of state control from the 820s, fought both in the employ of emirs and against them in middle of the ninth century. Attempts to corral him, by carrot or stick, were unsuccessful: the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* claims that he pronounced himself the 'third king of Spain', which must say something about the limitations of the emiral state.¹⁰⁶ These limitations were less obvious during the tenth century, for Córdoba's power so far outstripped that of all peninsular rivals in this period that the caliphate could make its presence felt wherever and whenever it chose to do so.

It needs to be acknowledged, though, that such is the characteristic slant of much of our source material, with its narrow focus on Córdoba, that we can be less sure about matters the farther we move from the capital. Indeed, while rural societies (as well as political

¹⁰⁵ Manzano Moreno, 'The Creation of a Medieval Frontier'.

¹⁰⁶ Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, 176.

relationships) can be painstakingly reconstructed from the abundant charters of the Christian north, no such option exists for historians of al-Andalus, for this kind of source does not exist. It is commonly held that charters do not survive from al-Andalus because their contents – which record claims to property and associated legal matters – were rendered obsolete (and thus lost or destroyed) as land passed back into Christian hands. To this may be added the fact that there existed no institution equivalent to the monastery in the Islamic world, monastic archivists being the essential copyists and preservers of such documentation in Christian contexts.

No such concerns exist when it comes to source material detailing the court politics of the emirs and caliphs of al-Andalus, for on this score we are well served, although it mostly dates from the tenth century or later. What use to make of this material has been a matter of some historiographical controversy. This is in large part because much of it survives in the work of later historians who are often perfectly happy to insert large chunks of text from now lost originals into their own accounts; among the writers of narrative history in Arabic there was indeed a consolidated culture of borrowing and copying from the work of predecessors. This certainly attests to a culture of respect for scholarship, but it has meant that the reliability of such accounts has attracted scrutiny, understandably enough. More sophisticated understandings of these sources are now emerging thanks to the work of specialists on early Arabic materials, and a certain rehabilitation of key Andalusī scholars has taken place since the 1990s.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps the most valuable Andalusī account is that of Ibn Hayyan. He wrote in the early eleventh century, although only a fraction of his work survives, focussing on parts of the ninth and tenth centuries. Important later writers such as Ibn Idhārī and al-Maqqari (who wrote, respectively, in the fourteenth and early seventeenth century) read and admired him. Works of value composed nearer the events they record include the histories of Ahmad al-Razi and his son Isa, tenth-century writers with close connections to the court at Córdoba; Isa's work

¹⁰⁷ N. Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia*; C. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, 2003).

is now lost but his father's way found its way into Spanish in the fourteenth century, having first been translated into Portuguese: both father and son were read by Ibn Hayyan. There is also the *Akhbār* tradition to consider, which provides anecdotal reflections on major events, and is best represented by the anonymous early eleventh-century text known as the *Akhbar Machmua*.¹⁰⁸

A great deal is known about the period after the Caliphate's collapse in 1031, since the ruination of the caliphal state led to the establishment of several small princely courts in major provincial cities such as Badajoz, Seville and Granada, each looking to outdo its rivals in terms of cultural and political prestige, a situation that led to a profusion of writings.¹⁰⁹ Government in the *ta'ifa* kingdoms was modelled on that of the Caliphate in the most basic sense, in that tax and commerce supported a court-based politics, but revenues collected locally were now spent locally too, on the capital city of each *ta'ifa*. Moreover, divested of the ideological cohesion and unifying ethos of the Caliphate – enshrined, above all, in loyalty to the Umayyads – the statelets that emerged in the first third of the eleventh century developed a different type of politics, 'local, pragmatic, and often very petty'.¹¹⁰ The wealth of some of the *ta'ifas*, Seville foremost among them, was quite remarkable, and it is to the memoirs of Abd al Buluggīn, the ruler of Granada, that we must look for confirmation of this fact: according to Buluggīn's doleful reflections, Alfonso VI demanded (and received) the sum of 30,000 dinars in the 1090s.¹¹¹ The tone of these autobiographical ruminations is strikingly melancholy. There was indeed to be no dressing this up, for the mighty had fallen, far and fast. By way of summary, then, we might say that government in al-Andalus from 800 to 1100 was a tale of mixed fortunes rather than linear and incremental growth, but given the way things panned out, it is

¹⁰⁸ Rather than cite all of these texts here, some of which have not been translated into English, I direct the reader to Clarke, *Muslim Conquest*, 209-13, for a comprehensive list.

¹⁰⁹ Wasserstein, *Party Kings*, ch. 4, gives a comprehensive list of the *ta'ifa* and their rulers, as well as information on the principal sources.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 117.

¹¹¹ Remie Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, 142-6.

unsurprising that an air of decadence envelops eleventh-century developments and is duly reflected in the historiography.

IDENTITY AND RELIGION

The Kingdoms of Asturias and León

The many and varied manifestations of identity in early medieval European contexts are easy enough to spot in the primary sources; yet in the secondary literature their meaning and significance remain a bone of contention. In the 1990s a great deal of historical scholarship explored the culturally specific attributes of ethnicity as a marker of identity, asking whether the latter was ‘situational’, or else something rather more permanent, bound up in tradition and biology.¹¹² Yet the cultural, linguistic and religious divides occasioned by 711, while extensively studied by historians, have been subsumed not by questions concerning ethnic identity as such, but the conceptual conceits of acculturation, tolerance, and – classically – *Convivencia* (coexistence), that is, coexistence between peoples of different faiths. Encounters between Muslims, Christians and Jews have indeed been at the forefront of scholarship on medieval Iberia, meaning that religion has been a long-standing focal point of studies on this period too, whether it be concerned with theological debate and dispute, the development of corporate institutions, or the rituals of pilgrimage and penitence. It therefore makes little sense to divide identity and religion into separate sections, for in both Islam and the Mozarabic rite that obtained among Iberian Christians, religion was so central to the particular identities of many of the peninsula’s inhabitants, that to create such a distinction would be misleading.

¹¹² A summary: A. Gillett, ‘Ethnogenesis: a contested model of early medieval Europe’, *History Compass* 4/2 (2006), 241-60.

Centuries-old clichés and preconceptions can be equally misleading, and Spanish history has been tainted by many. The most enduring of all concerns the unbending vehemence of Spanish Catholicism. Northern European commentators have long been struck by the seemingly unbreakable bond that unites Spain with the Roman Catholic Church. Elizabethan propagandists emphasised that Spanish adherence to authoritarian Catholicism was the true source of discord between the two countries. At the opening of Parliament, almost a century later, Cromwell went further, casting doubt over the basic Christian decency of the Spanish: ‘Why, truly, your great enemy is the Spaniard...I think he is not well acquainted with Scripture and things of God.’¹¹³ In actual fact, although much of Spain was assuredly Christian from Late Antiquity, the victory of the Catholic rite took many centuries, with relations between Spain and the see of Rome intermittent and strained until the eleventh century. Perhaps this not should surprise us overmuch. Even the beginnings of Spanish Catholicism were inauspicious, the apostle Paul promising in his Epistle to the Romans to proselytise in Spain, but – to the best of our knowledge – never setting foot there.¹¹⁴

The Visigothic Church, in its own rather idiosyncratic way, nonetheless became known for its intellectual brilliance in the seventh century, with luminaries like Isidore of Seville leading the way. By the early eighth century the Church remained in rude health, and Visigothic kings had successfully harnessed its ideological ballast to the ship of state, as P. D. King pointed out in a classic work of the 1970s.¹¹⁵ What happened to the Visigothic Church after 711 is another matter entirely, and it indeed becomes hard to see signs of prosperity or proselytising endeavour in the sources that survive the cataclysm of the Arab-Berber conquest. The reforms of the Carolingian Empire, it is certain, barely registered in the Christian kingdoms

¹¹³ S. C. Lomas (ed.), *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, with Elucidations by Thomas Carlyle* (3 vols., London, 1904), vol. II, 511 and 513.

¹¹⁴ Romans 15:24.

¹¹⁵ P. D. King, *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1972).

of northern Iberia, and had little effect whatsoever on the Church in al-Andalus. After all, Christians in Islamic Iberia had to face up to a new reality in which their right to remain Christian was recognised but the status of their religion diminished. Examples of the sort of literary production and Christological debate that animated churchmen in other parts of Europe are few from eighth-century Spain: the monk Beatus' *Commentary on the Apocalypse* later gained great popularity but he himself was confined to his mountain redoubt in Cantabria, even if he did manage to correspond with leading thinkers beyond Iberia. Some of his writings were aimed at refuting the Adoptionist theories espoused by Elipandus, metropolitan bishop of Toledo, a leading proponent of a heresy that considered Christ, as man, to be the adoptive son of God. For some historians, the Adoptionist controversy shows that Christianity in al-Andalus had not lost touch with issues of broad theological importance, nor with an agenda set by Frankish theologians; others, meanwhile, argue that the origins of Spanish Adoptionism only makes sense in the particular context of innovative Christian introspection brought about by the conquest of 711.¹¹⁶

Whatever the case may be, a skeletal and depleted network of bishoprics survived in Iberia after the Arab-Berber invasion.¹¹⁷ We cannot be sure about its precise components, nor can much be offered on leading ecclesiasts; it is also impossible to know whether the Church made any real pretence to peninsula-wide cohesion, although this must be doubted. The major southern cities definitely retained their connections with resident bishops, and, along with this, their episcopal status, if we are prepared to accept the report of a general council of the Church, held in Córdoba in 839, as well as several anecdotal references to bishops in major Andalusí cities, embedded in Arabic texts.¹¹⁸ The metropolitan bishops of Toledo, Seville and Mérida

¹¹⁶ These positions are explored in J. Cavadini, *The Last Christology of the West: Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul, 785-820* (Philadelphia, 1993).

¹¹⁷ The best book on these matters is J. Fernández Conde, *La religiosidad medieval en España. I: Alta Edad Media (siglos VII-X)* (Oviedo, 2000).

¹¹⁸ Collins offers a detailed appraisal of this council in *Caliphs and Kings*, 97-102.

all attended the council of 839, as did the bishops of four other southern sees, suggesting at first sight that the institutional church was not overly disrupted by the upheaval these cities experienced in the eighth century. However, this consideration needs to be tempered somewhat by the fact that many sees were lost altogether in the aftermath of 711, and the Andalusí Church had nothing like the structural complexity of its Visigothic progenitor: it had also, of course, ceased to be a legitimising agent of the state.

In the north, the Church could have had no such pretensions in the early eighth century, for in the nucleus of the tiny Kingdom of Asturias, there was not a single surviving Visigothic episcopal see. Early kings certainly recognised that this was unacceptable and set about expanding their territory so as to absorb and renovate former *sedes episcopales* when the circumstances allowed, as well as to create new dioceses. The renovation of episcopal sees has been associated with the repopulation of areas left desolate and sparsely populated in the generation or two after 711, and for many historians this process was in train by the first half of the ninth century. However, any attempted narrative retelling of the restoration of abandoned sees and the foundation of new ones by the Asturians rests upon shaky foundations; the chronicles are by no means clear on these matters – at least before *Sampiro* – and many assumptions are based upon obscure references in charters.¹¹⁹

The major city of the kingdom, Oviedo, certainly witnessed church building in the ninth century, and in a document of 812 (once considered of doubtful authenticity but now accepted, with caveats, by most commentators), Alfonso II made a donation to the new cathedral church of his capital.¹²⁰ This document was vouchsafed by five bishops, one of them from Calahorra in La Rioja, not too far from the emiral stronghold of Zaragoza, an indication that channels of

¹¹⁹ Advocates of the ‘episcopal reconquest’ include Fernández Conde, *La religiosidad medieval*, 127, and O’Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 185. On *Sampiro*, see n. 20.

¹²⁰ Floriano, *Diplomática*, no. 24; J. Montenegro and A. Del Castillo, ‘The Alfonso II document of 812, the *Annales Portugaleses Veteres*, and the Continuity of the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo as the Kingdom of Asturias’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 87 (2009), 197–214.

communication between leading churchmen from across the northern half of the peninsula were in place. Alfonso II's reign seems to have stimulated institutional growth beyond the Asturias too: an important new see was created at Valpuesta, on the fringes of the Basque country, while the ancient Galician sees of Braga and Dumio were 'translated' to the north in the early ninth century, their bishops taking up residence in Lugo and Mondoñedo respectively.¹²¹ Originally a major monastery in the Braga region of what is now northern Portugal, Dumio had been given episcopal status in the middle of the sixth century, meaning that it was governed by an abbot-bishop. The duties of this enigmatic though doubtless influential figure reflected a conflation of roles characteristic of early medieval Iberian forms of coenobitic practice.

Monasticism was particularly important in Spain precisely because episcopal structures were far from developed in much of the peninsula. In this fragmented spiritual environment, monasteries tended to the devotional needs of rural folk and became economic hubs in their local communities. The basis of these communities was sometimes a single family or a group of friends, sometimes pooling their assets for the common good, as witnessed in the pactual monasticism peculiar to parts of northern Spain in these centuries. A few dozen or so of these pacts, all based on the Common Rule of Fructuosus, a seventh-century prototype attributed to the bishop of Braga of that name, survive in the charter record.¹²² They are bilateral agreements between an abbot and the monastic community, in which certain regulations establish the rights common to all, while also confirming the abbot's authority as sacrosanct. This has led some historians to consider the pact an instrument by which elites preyed upon weaker elements of their community, effectively forcing them into relationships of dependence – a proto-feudalisation of the social landscape dressed up as religious fervour; by way of contrast, an

¹²¹ O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 185, and, on Dumio, 82.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 81, for a précis of the handful of monastic rules that survive.

Anglophone scholarly tradition places emphasis instead on the order and structure that these pacts gave to communities in search of sustenance, material and spiritual.¹²³

Alongside these smaller monastic communities, the ninth and tenth centuries would see the foundation and growth of a number of hugely powerful monasteries in the Christian north, sometimes tethered to the fortunes of grand aristocratic families. These institutions were often very large-scale corporate landowners, and given that many of their title deeds survive as charters, many historians see such monasteries as little more than unscrupulous realtors. The Spanish historiography, for instance, has tended to look beyond the spiritual aspects of these institutions, preferring to focus on the role that monks played as estate managers. In part, this reflects the embeddedness of Marxisant currents of thought, a notable feature of the scholarly landscape since Barbero and Vigil. It must also reflect the fact that the Benedictine Rule played no major role in Spanish monasticism until after the year 1000, a point of difference with developments beyond the Pyrenees that impels some to overlook the missionary zeal underlying much monastic foundation in previous centuries.

Such zeal was certainly not in short supply in the eleventh century, when French influence became prominent, as the wider Reform Movement began to draw Spain within the common bounds of Western Christendom. The Burgundian monastery of Cluny played the crucial role, becoming ‘the favoured recipient, in return for the expert prayers of the monks, of annual payments of Muslim gold from the royal family of León-Castile’.¹²⁴ Cluniac monks flooded into Spain, bringing with them a determination to impose Franco-papal dictates concerning correct liturgical practice: correspondingly, after some dramatic royal interventions

¹²³ M. Loring García, *Cantabria en la alta edad media* (Madrid, 1988); cf. R. Portass, *The Village World*, 43-8; C. Bishko, ‘The Pactual Tradition in Spanish Monasticism’, in his *Spanish and Portuguese Monastic History* (London, 1984), 1-43.

¹²⁴ R. Fletcher, ‘The Early Middle Ages’, in R. Carr (ed.), *Spain: A History* (Oxford, 2000), 63-89, at 76; C. Bishko, ‘Fernando I and the Origins of the Leonese-Castilian Alliance with Cluny’, *Cuadernos de Historia de España* 47-48 (1968), 31-135; and 49-50 (1969), 50-116.

and heated conversations, the Mozarabic rite, of Visigothic origins, was discarded in 1080, to be replaced by the Roman Catholic rite.¹²⁵ That it was not given up without a fight, splitting the Church down the middle in the process, is indicative of the crucial role it played in forming peninsular Christian identity – a link, perhaps, to a cherished, if imagined, past. The figurehead of Cluniac influence was Bernard of Sédillac, who became abbot of Sahagún in 1080 and archbishop of Toledo from 1086 to 1124. Historiographical debate centres upon the precocity of Cluniac links with the royal house of Castile-León, a question that has seen historians differ markedly in their views: Lucy Pick has urged us to be sceptical about the supposed annual donations made by Fernando I to Cluny, revising our chronologies in the process; Patrick Henriët, on the other hand, has made the case for the existence of strong links between the Burgundian house and Castile-León from the middle of the eleventh century, arguing that this relationship was actively cultivated by both parties.¹²⁶

The single most significant moment in the life of the corporate Church in early medieval Spain must surely be the discovery in about 812 of a sepulchre in Galicia, reported to contain the remains of St James the Great.¹²⁷ Brought to light by the bishop of Iria Flavia, a certain Teodomiro, the apostle's relics seem to have attracted veneration and patronage almost instantly, Alfonso II deciding to build a shrine to St James a few miles inland at Santiago de Compostela. Over the centuries this small chapel was to grow into an enormous cathedral church, and Santiago himself (St James) became a totem of Christian, and later, Spanish identity.¹²⁸ The apostolic relics securely in place, Santiago de Compostela was to become an important city and a major centre of pilgrimage, soon drawing pilgrims from across the

¹²⁵ J. Montenegro Valentín, 'La alianza de Alfonso VI con Cluny y la abolición del rito mozárabe en los reinos de León y Castilla', *Iacobus* 25-26 (2009), 47-62

¹²⁶ L. Pick, 'Rethinking Cluny in Spain', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 5 (2013), 1-17; P. Henriët, 'Cluny and Spain before Alfonso VI: remarks and propositions', in *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 9 (2017), 206-19.

¹²⁷ F. López Alsina, *La ciudad de Santiago de Compostela en la alta edad media*, 2nd edn (Santiago de Compostela, 2013), 113-26.

¹²⁸ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 114.

continent; its institutional heft within the Church at large was also recognised by the end of our period, when the see of Iria Flavia was translated to Santiago in 1095. Collins cautions us to remember that our perspectives on the early history of Santiago are almost entirely based on the twelfth-century *Historia Compostellana*, the brainchild of the wily bishop Diego Gelmírez, whose efforts to aggrandise the myth and reality of Santiago would see it elevated to an archbishopric in 1120; others are less circumspect, affording great importance to the church and city from its earliest moments, in spite of the fact that the discovery of the disciple's body went unrecorded in any of the major Christian chronicles dating to the late ninth century.¹²⁹

Although there was clearly much disruption of the Visigothic-era episcopal infrastructure in the eighth century, the ghost of the Visigoths continued to haunt the Asturians, as it indeed does much of the historiography. To find out why this is so, one needs to return to the primary sources, and specifically the cycle of chronicles dated to the reign of Alfonso III. References therein recall how 'beforehand, all of Spain was governed under one law alone, under the Kingdom of the Goths, and it outshone other lands in wisdom and knowledge'.¹³⁰ More striking still is the statement in the *Chronicle of Albelda* that Alfonso II 'established in Oviedo the entire order of the Goths, just as it had been in Toledo, in both Church and palace'.¹³¹ What to make of this supposed *neogoticismo*? That is to say, what substance, if any, underlay the claims of the Asturian court historians? For some modern commentators, the chroniclers' claims reflected the fact that a small kernel of the northern peoples were themselves of Gothic stock, meaning that they likely offered refuge to defeated 'compatriots' in the 710s, ensuring a relatively seamless continuation from one royal line into another: thus

¹²⁹ R. Collins, *Early medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400-1000* (London, 1983), 233-4; cf. López Alsina, *La ciudad de Santiago*, 253-68, and Barton, 'Spain in the Eleventh Century', 174-6. There is no English translation of the *Compostellana* but Santiago de Compostela and Diego Gelmírez are brought to life in engaging style in R. Fletcher, *St. James's Catapult: the Life and Times of Diego Gelmírez of Santiago de Compostela* (Oxford, 1984).

¹³⁰ Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, 135.

¹³¹ *Chronica Adefonsi tertii regis, Alb.*, XV, 9.

the Visigothic kingdom begat the Asturian kingdom.¹³² For others, to dwell on the reality of this apparent continuity of rule among the peninsula's leading Christian kingdoms on either side of the Arab-Berber conquest is to miss the point: the Asturians may not have been by direct descent the inheritors of the Visigothic mantle but nonetheless considered themselves its ideological legatees.¹³³ A third perspective believes that the Testament of 812, discussed above on p. X, reflects the need of the Asturians to present their rule as if it were forged in the northern mountains *sui generis*, a view that has met with censorious refutation.¹³⁴

A Visigothic legal identity certainly endured in Iberia after 711, and is attested by the many charters featuring the formulation '*sicut lex gotica docet*' ('as the gothic law instructs'). Later chronicles also draw parallels with kings from the distant Visigothic past, the *Silense* informing us that King Vermudo 'confirmed the laws established by King Wamba' and 'ordered canon law to be observed', although none of this legislative activity survives, which raises doubts as to the veracity of the claim. Here, though, we land upon the true significance of this strange appeal to the Visigothic inheritance, helping us to understand its endurance as a characteristic component of the identity of the later Christian kingdoms: law-giving and the strict observance of canonical principles lent lustre to royal endeavours; given that the Visigoths had excelled in both of these spheres of activity, they were a natural model to which later kingdoms could aspire, regardless of any real affinity. To add fuel to the fire, the most emblematic of all Visigothic symbols, the royal city of Toledo, returned to Christian hands in 1085, and its former glories must have inspired those who petitioned Pope Urban II in the late 1080s, asking him to recognise the see of Toledo's primacy in the Spanish Church, which he duly did. These successes prompted the Christians to refashion their sense of collective self,

¹³² L. Barrau-Dihigo, 'Recherches sur l'histoire politique du royaume asturien (718-910)', *Revue Hispanique* 52 (1921), 1-360.

¹³³ An idea defended stoutly in recent times by T. Deswarte, *De la destruction à la restauration: L'idéologie du royaume d'Oviedo-León (VIIIe-XIe siècles)* (Turnhout, 2003).

¹³⁴ A. Isla Frez, 'Monarchy and Neogothicism in the Astur Kingdom, 711-910', *Francia* 26 (2000), 41-56; Montenegro and Del Castillo, 'The Alfonso II document of 812'.

and a recent study has proposed that the eleventh century saw the emergence of new identities – Castilian-Leonese perhaps, but also imperial, even Crusader.¹³⁵

Al-Andalus

Religion and identity in Islam go hand in hand: to follow Islam is to make a statement of first principles, to embrace a text, the Quran, that serves not just as the basis of religious instruction but also as a guide to life and how to live it. The Arabic language therefore lay at the heart of all religious teaching; given that it was also the language of government, it is not surprising, as Hitchcock states, that by the early ninth century, ‘Islam was acquiring permanence in the cities’.¹³⁶ A century or so later, in the great conurbations at least, it was dominant.¹³⁷ This led to a flowering in the use of Arabic in all sorts of contexts, the arts and learning included, as evidenced by the presence in ninth-century Córdoba of the polymath Ibn Firnās and the musician, fashionista, celebrity chef and all-round trendsetter Ziryāb, this latter said to be the inventor of deodorant no less.¹³⁸ But if wine (made from fermented dates, not grapes), women and song belonged to rather rarefied quarters, the growing use of Arabic by earnest young men of the sort who would have stuck to Latin primers in earlier ages, can only have grated with committed Christians. For if language was another facet of cultural confidence, what did the growing dominance of Arabic over Latin say about Christianity?

Mozarabs, that is, ‘Arabised’ Christians, are so described because they took on aspects of the dress and speech of the Muslims but did not convert to Islam. Their role in Andalusī society has been seen as central to our understanding of cultural and linguistic syncretism in Iberia. However, the terms ‘Mozarab’ and ‘Mozarabic’ summon up a wide range of meanings

¹³⁵ Sirantoine, *Imperator Hispaniae*.

¹³⁶ Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered*, 52.

¹³⁷ See the pioneering statistical work of R. Bulliett, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period. An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA, 1979).

¹³⁸ Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered*, 54-5.

and associations, applied to everything from figurative art to architectural motifs; furthermore, these terms were not used in Arabic texts, which referred to Christians in a variety of ways, such as *naṣāra* ('Nazarenes') or *rūmī* ('Romans'), as well as a whole host of more derogatory epithets.¹³⁹ Yet any doubts we may have about the ability of Christians to assimilate aspects of the culture of their political masters are dispelled, with no little irony, by the execution of forty-eight Christians who deliberately sought martyrdom in Córdoba in the 850s.¹⁴⁰ These deaths were reported to us by two eye-witnesses, writing in Latin. One of these observers, the priest Eulogius, met his end at the hands of Islamic judges, having harboured an apostate and insulted the Prophet when brought before the *qadi*; our other source was written by Eulogius' friend and confidante Paulus Alvarus, who gives us a clear sense of the frustration that he and other learned Romance-speaking Christians felt at the growing relegation in status of their beloved Latin literature.

Many historians take Paulus Alvarus's words with a pinch of salt, considering the hyperbole of his rhetoric reason enough to doubt the veracity of the points he makes, but were it not for the fact that young Christians were becoming ignorant of their religion, law and language, as he claims, then it would be hard to explain the zeal with which individuals sought martyrdom. Indeed, Collins is surely right to emphasise that even if this movement be considered a cry of desperation, it was one formed in the face of a perceived existential threat.¹⁴¹ This point is all the more compelling if we accept that Bulliett identified the middle of the tenth century, and not the ninth, as the high point of conversion to Islam in Iberia, for we must then accept that the growing importance of Islam in the ninth-century cities was likely still offset by not insubstantial numbers of urban Christians.¹⁴² This being the case, Christys is

¹³⁹ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 119. M. De Epalza, 'Mozarabs: An Emblematic Christian Minority in Islamic al-Andalus', in Jayyusi, *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, 149-70.

¹⁴⁰ The bibliography on this subject is vast. A good starting point is K. B. Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge, 1988).

¹⁴¹ Collins, *Unity in Diversity*, 211-17.

¹⁴² Bulliett, *Conversion to Islam*, ch. 10.

perhaps correct to downplay the significance afforded to the martyr movement as a whole, pointing in support to the Christian bishops who flocked to denounce this insurgent streak of religious radicalism within their own community. By any definition, the martyrs were extremists, and their experience was far from typical. By the same token, Christys, and Menocal too for that matter, underplay the movement's implications: certain conservative members of the social elite were anything but 'Arabised' and would, as Hitchcock states, have been horrified at the thought.¹⁴³ These reactionaries certainly recognised Arabic's appeal to others, but were themselves in doubt about the superior claims of Christian Latin culture and its monuments; hence the very heartfelt nature of their lamentations, as the world they cherished crumbled away around them.

Yet identity was complex, and it worked in a variety of ways; consequently, categories such as Christian and Muslim, Arabic- and Latin-speaking, are over neat. For example, some of the martyrs of Córdoba were of Arab ethnicity; Ibn al-Qūṭīya, a tenth-century historian impeccably versed in Arabic history-writing traditions, nonetheless cleaved to his Gothic (and presumably Christian) origins, made clear by his surname, which means 'son of the Gothic woman'. A group of some importance in Andalusi government and politics in the tenth and eleventh centuries were the *Ṣaqāliba* ('Slavs'), Christians of servile origins who converted to Islam.¹⁴⁴ Acculturation, assimilation and bilingualism were thus not uni-directional forces, and fear of the 'Other' and its culture was not confined to the Christians: Safran has shown how Muslim legal experts debated, indeed feared, Christian and Jewish influence as often as they embraced it.¹⁴⁵ Religion and identity were thus intertwined strands of a truly complex social fabric, the many threads of which historians are still attempting to unravel.

¹⁴³ A. Christys, *Christians in al-Andalus, 711-1000* (Richmond, 2002), 79; Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, 66-78; Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered*, 59.

¹⁴⁴ De Epalza, 'Mozarabs', 151; Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 182-5.

¹⁴⁵ J. Safran, 'Identity and Differentiation in Ninth-Century al-Andalus', *Speculum* 76 (2001), 573-98.

Convivencia

If *Reconquista* for long held sway as the preferred explanation of political change in the medieval Iberian Peninsula, *Convivencia* exercised a similar position with regard to matters of identity. The term, taken to signify the putative enlightened coexistence of Muslims, Christian and Jews in Iberia, can be traced back to Américo Castro's famed text of 1948, a landmark in Hispanic studies that seemed to add colour to the forbidding tones of Sánchez-Albornoz's orotund declarations of Castilian exceptionalism.¹⁴⁶ For Castro, medieval Iberia was a land of exciting and impressive cross-cultural encounters, characterised, broadly speaking, by a climate of religious tolerance in which peoples of different faiths intermingled and cultural symbiosis was the norm. The appeal of such an interpretation of the peninsula's history is easy enough to appreciate: this notwithstanding, it is only fair to recognise that *Convivencia* becomes less convincing the better one acquaints oneself with the very primary sources said to describe it.

This indeed is the line taken by Maya Soifer in an important article of 2009.¹⁴⁷ This article surveys the myriad ways that historians have attempted to expose the limitations of *Convivencia*, and, in a few cases, rehabilitate the term. The most fundamental criticism of the concept is that it paints a hopelessly romantic and unrealistic picture of Andalusí society – a picture that is, tellingly, at odds with the descriptions of medieval Iberian social relations found in the primary sources. Collins has addressed this shortcoming in trenchant fashion, reminding us that 'even in Córdoba at its cultural apogee it will have been hard to escape the reek of decomposing flesh from the decapitated heads displayed on the gates and the bodies of those publicly crucified, left to rot in front of the palace.'¹⁴⁸ Darío Fernández Morera has gone further

¹⁴⁶ A. Castro, *España en su historia: cristianos, moros y judíos* (Buenos Aires, 1948), translated into English as W. F. King and S. Margaretten (transl.), *The Spaniards: an Introduction to their History* (Berkeley, 1971).

¹⁴⁷ M. Soifer, 'Beyond Convivencia: Critical Reflections on the Historiography of Interfaith Relations in Christian Spain', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 1 (2009), 19-35.

¹⁴⁸ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 1-2.

still; for him this supposed age of mutual toleration and respect was nothing of the sort, *Convivencia* being little more than an anachronism sustained in the popular imagination by a host of worthy but disingenuous platitudes.¹⁴⁹ The leading counsel for the defence, in some ways the inspiration for the assault on *Convivencia* that has taken place over the last fifteen years, is Rosa Menocal's important and sophisticated monograph, *The Ornament of the World*. This book sets out to reveal a lost 'golden age', but in doing so fails to confront the elephant in the room, neatly summarised by Soifer: '*Convivencia* has consistently failed on empirical grounds'.¹⁵⁰

Even the so-called Jewish golden age must be called into question, at least before 1100, for although the Jewish presence is afforded importance in some secondary literature, evidence in support of this position is scarce in both the Christian kingdoms and al-Andalus. A few funerary inscriptions testify to the existence of Jewish communities in the Islamic south, and a handful of well-known figures populate the narrative sources – the medic, intellectual and advisor to Abd al Rahman III, Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, foremost among them.¹⁵¹ But Jewish landowners are conspicuous by their absence from the charter material and it is only in the *ta'ifa* period that a few powerful Jewish individuals attained political power. Samuel ha-Nagid and his son Yūsuf both rose to become powerful administrators at the Zīrid court at Granada in the second half of the eleventh century, but they were hardly representative of a pattern discernible elsewhere in this period.¹⁵²

Identity, religious or otherwise, therefore raises more questions than it supplies answers. Neogothicism might have animated the self-image of the court chroniclers of Alfonso III, but this attempted cultural and ideological borrowing was largely unknown in Islam. But

¹⁴⁹ Fernández Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, passim.

¹⁵⁰ Soifer, 'Beyond Convivencia', 31.

¹⁵¹ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 175-9.

¹⁵² Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered*, 115-17.

how could things have been otherwise, given the fact that the *Dar al-Islam* ‘came to possess normative linguistic, religious and cultural aspects’ that brooked no equal, its rulers imposing discriminatory taxes on non-Muslims? The ‘peoples of the north’ barely roused any interest among the writers of our Arabic sources, no matter how peaceable everyday life might have been for the people of different faiths rubbing shoulders in Córdoba.¹⁵³ Even the Mozarabs in their midst went largely unnoticed. In the Christian north our sources record battles, unlikely but expedient alliances with Muslim rebels, and diplomacy, but say ‘almost nothing about Islam’.¹⁵⁴ These final reflections provide a salutary lesson, for it is not our duty to find examples from an imagined enlightened past with which to identify our own shortcomings, evident enough as they are. Medieval Iberia needs to be treated on its own terms; such is its inherent interest and complexity, that this is surely enough.

¹⁵³ A. K. Bennison, ‘The Peoples of the North in the Eyes of the Muslims of Umayyad al-Andalus (711-1031)’, *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007), 157-74.

¹⁵⁴ Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 87.